

2-2-07 28552

(16.)

[Reprinted from THE PHILADELPHIA MEDICAL JOURNAL, March 1, 1902.]

THE RECOGNITION AND TRAINING OF MENTAL DEFECTIVES.*

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I am glad to meet you to-day in this discussion of the feeble-minded, and to feel it a subject in which you and I have a mutual interest. A most absorbing one it has proved to me from the very inception of my life work, while you will find yourselves brought in touch with it at almost every step in yours, so wide-spread is this evil of degeneracy.

The two points, as I understand, which you wish made clear are first, how to recognize these defectives, and next, what to do with them.

For the first, it will be well for you to carry with you always the two broad divisions of the race—for a race it is as distinct and apart as Negro or Malay—namely Idiot and Imbecile; which will mean to you simply Untrainable and Trainable; or those needing perpetual asylum care whether in the home or out of it, as distinct from those who may, through training, become in a measure aids in the work of redeeming themselves and their fellows from vice and pauperism.

The idiot you will have no difficulty in recognizing as the lesser evil. With the senses poorly if at all developed, no power of articulate language, which with them is but a cry; frequently epileptic or crippled, locomotion if possible at all is but a shuffling or lurching forward. Incapable of any of the softer emotions, a mother, whom they often do not recognize, is to them nothing more than any other nurse; the home which they burden simply an abiding place. A well ordered asylum,

*Read before the Summer School in Philanthropic Work, New York City, July 18th, 1901.

where rich and poor alike receive the same tender care and guardianship, is therefore the only proper provision for this class; and here, too, his brother, only one degree less helpless, although physically stronger, whom for convenience we designate the idio-imbecile, may not only find the only happiness he is capable of in caring for these "babies," but may in time become a useful aid in this large nursery of perpetual infancy.

You will have from time to time presented to you children described as "odd, dumb, incorrigible". You will hear the mother say: "This child is so different from my others—so different from my neighbors." These at a superficial glance you will not recognize; but observing closely, you will find that all the so-called "odd" children are really imbecile. You will note in one or another the furtive glance, the drooling mouth, the muttering, the mirthless laugh, the malformed head, mouth or ear, the imperative movements of fingers, hands or body, and the singular twist of head or features. A phenomenal memory, or some special talent unduly developed, is a not infrequent characteristic. These, signs sometimes but rarely, of an inherited defect purely physical are still the mark of the beast and almost certain in one or two generations to meet its dread associate either mental or moral, or to unite with both, making degeneration complete.

Again you may find both mental and moral defect associated with physical perfection, so manifold are the phases of hereditary transmission; all the more dangerous is moral obliquity under an engaging exterior—a devil in the disguise of an angel—the rounded perfection of form and feature masking a brain incapable of logical conclusions. These constitute the class of trainable defectives, and are, as you see, of various grades and conditions. Nearly approaching normal in the higher, you may perhaps confound the lower grade with the untrainable idio-imbecile, for like him, he never learns to read and write, and is capable of being trained only in the

minor occupations of farm and household service. A mere hewer of wood or drawer of water, he must be forever under guardianship and kept apart from those who would victimize or use him as a tool for ill, for he is absolutely wanting in will-power, and will follow blindly any suggestion. Even his brother, the sharp and cunning moral imbecile of a higher grade of mentality, could easily use him for murder, arson, or any other plot he himself would be fully capable of devising. Here is the danger to society, as well as to the individual, in attempting to care for him in the home; for an innocent, in his carelessness and ignorance, may often wreak more ill than the knave, who is restrained somewhat by fear of consequences. Then in the matter of training, while he might at home learn to do something in house, farm or garden, there is not enough in the ordinary home to keep him occupied; and, creatures of habit, these children lose in a day what they learn in a week, and once sunk in sloth will not rouse under coercion alone. Occupation, if it is to insure real benefit, must therefore be daily, and constant—becoming under kind but firm direction almost automatic—with the added stimulus of companionship with those of similar capacity, giving a sense of community of labor. They need, too, entertainment and amusement when work is done; in fact, there must be a constant interchange of work and play, coupled with never-ceasing sympathy, lest they sink into apathetic idiocy or break out into insanity.

Now I would not wish to be misunderstood as saying that defectives may not be developed and cared for in the home: but I do say, that it can only be at tremendous expenditure of vital force with a minimum of profit to the individual. The attention to mere physical wants; the regular bathing, dressing, dieting and exercising—a simple matter in an asylum—would with the poor, or even the better working class, fall heavily upon the mother; while training, which must be persistent and unremitting, with, as I have said, every accessory of

stimulus, control and emulation, should not be even attempted by one not possessed of many acquirements and also endowed with that most inestimable gift—the power of imparting. You see, dormant faculties are to be aroused without awakening that obstinacy which is always lurking; while intense indolence must be overcome and weariness avoided by attractive and varied occupations. Music, drawing and color-work, modelling in clay and cardboard, sloyd and wood-carving, basket, hammock and hat making, mending and sewing, lace and embroidery, offer endless opportunity for selection in fitting the work to the child; but what one person can attempt the half of it and attend to home duties? Granted that it were possible, I would still say that constant association with one person would become in time as dwarfing to the pupil as it would prove wearing to the teacher; each would act unfavorably upon the other, and we must remember, the defective does not have the avenues for varied social intercourse, even with members of his own family, that a normal child educated by a governess has. His aptitude for imitation causes him to gain most readily in association with his fellows; whereas placed in competition with normal children his self-esteem is constantly wounded, his self-respect blunted, and he becomes shy, sullen and discouraged.

The movement for the establishment of special classes at various centres in connection with the public schools in some of our large cities, profiting by the successful experiment in London, is a great step towards solving the problem of relief equally for the normal and the defective; but to be really effective, these must employ attendants as well as teachers. When such classes are out of reach the co-operative plan might be feasible. Two or more families engaging the services of a good kindergärtner who is also a good musician, might thus secure variety, freshness and vivacity, coupled with the healthful companionship and association which is so essential. This, however, would doubtless be too expensive

for the family of ordinary means, and after all were done, the veriest pauper in a well appointed institution would be better off than he. For, even under the most favorable conditions, the home is not the best place for the imbecile; one by the very nature of his infirmity forever set apart, a blight upon the social life that he himself is unable to appreciate, or to miss when he loses. Lonely and consequently fretful and intractable when debarred from companionship with his fellows, neither is he so comfortable in an environment not suited to his physical needs; a regular regimen is for him there well nigh impossible, and this, added to irregular hours, undue excitement, lack of entertainment and the daily watchful care of the physician, must result sooner or later in certain deterioration.

Not only the defective, but the family is to be considered. An axiom, dictated by experience, is that for every defective sequestered, the energy of two if not three normal persons is released to society. You should, therefore, advise unhesitatingly: "Rather place your afflicted one where he can receive better attention than you are able to give, even if to do this it be necessary for you yourself to seek employment; for thus you will not only benefit the child and remove a cloud from your home, but you economize your strength instead of wasting it in fruitless endeavor." More than one mother has come to me with the bitter cry: "I have devoted my life to this child to find only failure at last."

Children of middle grade, judged by the common school standard of reading and writing, would be deemed utter incapables; for they have facility in neither. Some knowledge of the three "Rs" laboriously attained, serves only to put his name on his work or to aid in measurements; for children of this grade find their development, their happiness and present usefulness, in manual training, and their life work in the handicrafts to which this training is the open door for both sexes.

The high-grade imbecile, to which class are close-

ly allied all those feebly-gifted and backward ones whose difficulties may not be traced to causes purely physical, is the one least recognizable, and whose future must therefore always be a subject for anxiety. Special methods may enable one of this class to advance as far as the first intermediate or grammar school, if not deterred by individual idiosyncrasies; and one would think that given an ordinary school course under exceptional surroundings, intercourse with refined, cultured people, together with drawing, modeling, manual and musical training, and actual practice in one or another of the trades, that success was assured to a young man or woman, at least for a start in life, but our experience has been directly the contrary. One and another going out returns to us with the same experience to relate: "They don't understand me." "They don't want me." "Somehow I can't get along with people." They are unable to adjust themselves to social conditions, to accept rebuffs, to endure hardships, to live without sympathy and a sense of protection, and are glad to come back and take up work in familiar surroundings. They represent the incapables, the ne'er-do-wells who, unrecognized as abnormal, are causing the heart-aches of the world. Working with us, where they are understood, are not over-taxed, and have no responsibility, they come in time to make useful members of our communities: as attendants, printers, typewriters, indeed, in any of those trades that demand automatic skill coupled with a certain amount of mental ability, they do well. At Elwyn our corps of printers for months at a time manage their office unassisted, including the general printing of the household and the issuing of their semi-monthly paper. The editor and manager is also a musician, doing so well with both brass and stringed instruments that we gave him a course on the violin at the conservatory, and shall try him another year as teacher of the orchestra; yet he himself is satisfied to remain with us, feeling that he cannot afford to lose the sense of protection here. We have, too,

a rare caricaturist who is also a musician—a member of our band—yet he, unprotected and uncared for, would simply starve.

People often say to me: "What is the matter with that one?" "He looks all right". "He does well". "Why is he here?" Yes, why? That is the question! It is not what he lacks so much as what he is. His general make-up—poor material, which, in spite of apparent brilliancy or talent, will never stand wear or tear, must always be taken care of. Children we call them, and children they are from the cradle to the grave. Age does not count with them.

The moral imbecile—one who does indeed lack the moral sense—is found in all grades. A fire-brand in society, with us always under custodial care, he of all irresponsibles needs most and gets least because most misunderstood. This is the material that most criminals are made of. Truly they know not what they do, for they are not immoral but am-moral; they have not lost the moral sense, they never have possessed it. Yet how many are condemned for deeds of which they have been the innocent perpetrators. His mental defect, taking often the bent of extreme precocity or cleverness in certain lines, is never grasped by the ordinary layman, and not infrequently in criminal trials proves the surest weapon in the hands of the prosecuting attorney. You will sometimes hear a jurymen exclaim: "That smart fellow not know what he is doing! You will never convince me of that". Yet he would be amazed to see that same "smart fellow" absorbed in childish sports or watching with smiling complacency the amputation of his own fingers; for he is often as insensible to pain himself as for others—excepting always a wound to his egotism. Nothing gives him so much delight as notoriety, and to this end he early distinguishes himself as the bully of the schools, the terror of the neighborhood, and the frequenter of police courts, graduating rapidly into criminal ranks, often feeding upon sensational literature and lending his hand to obscene writing. Far better that

he be early recognized, and in permanent sequestration find his healthful development in manual training—even without a knowledge of reading and writing, which he would only use for evil purposes—his active propensities satisfied with abundant opportunities for varied and congenial employment, together with military and calisthenic exercises, games and athletic sports. Such cases excepting always those which border too closely on insanity, might form a separate department of training schools more properly than do asylums for the helpless and untrainable idiot class; but this would involve, of course, facilities for control greater than at present provided. In custodial buildings, with spacious but well guarded verandas and playgrounds, all could find space for work and free play, while those making a good record might have the privilege of attending the entertainments—theatrical, musical and dancing—of the school.

Such homes of prevention would cost the State less than criminal trials, penitentiary or capital punishment; while the gain socially and morally would be incalculable; not to speak of the cessation of those object lessons in vice and crime which have an inciting, rather than a deterrent effect upon the rising generation. Think of the beneficence of the withdrawal of this turbid stream, permitting it no more to mingle with the life-blood of the nation! Without this, the stringency of marriage laws, to the necessity of which the attention of legislators is already being directed, will be completely nullified—they will simply come too late. If not recognized and sequestered while yet minors, who shall say that this young man or woman is unfit for conjugal or parental responsibilities. Just now they not infrequently say it of one another, and the divorce courts confirm the declaration—but too late for themselves and for society. We know not what evil may not be averted by the early withdrawal of this class now both defective and delinquent, which must sooner or later come to be altogether dependent. For, believe me, of all the various kinds of defect,

nothings clings and is transmitted like this. With the blind or deaf mute we may find all other faculties and attributes more generally normal, but with the mental and moral defective there is that general perversion—one-sidedness, amounting in many cases to monstrosity, often associated with physical deformity; or else there is a certain poverty of the whole being from general malnutrition through successive generations of degenerates; all of which goes to form what we term "bad stock." Such inbreeding we do not permit in our domestic animals, and is it not suicidal in a wise nation to accord such license—I will not say liberty—to its citizens? To promulgate this doctrine is the work to which all who labor in the cause of social well-being are undoubtedly called.

Of the imperative need for the permanent sequestration of all classes of mental defectives, there can be no doubt; equally apparent is it that this, for the helpless should be affected elsewhere than either in the almshouses, which have no facilities for their proper safe-guarding, or in the training schools which they burden. I cannot urge upon you therefore too strongly that each in his respective sphere advocate and influence the erection of asylums to meet this pressing need; for the helpless idiot and epileptic, and also for the adult imbecile and idio-imbecile who may aid in ministering to their weaker brethren. Not only this, but it is greatly to be desired that through the endeavors of your own and similar organizations may come such a sifting that in providing for such a mass of helpless and helpful, untrainable and trainable, guileless and vicious irresponsibles, each by going to his own place may better insure the well-being and safety of all, and the training schools, then relieved of the burden as well as the obloquy of idiocy, may be free to deal with the large numbers of trainables tested by probation in the special classes before alluded to, and there proven and adjudged defective by competent authority. Here,

received under conditions which science, experience and humanitarianism dictate—conditions sanctioned and promoted by wise legislation—these life-long children would then have an ensured home and future; either in the institution where they have been trained, or better still, in separate colonies or reservations, as may be provided. By such transference the natural longing for change, the eager desire to test new-found powers would be gratified, the self-respect implanted with such care would be sustained by appreciation in a somewhat broadened field; and labor, no longer regarded as childish attempts, would find its recognition in a reasonable compensation. Thus, satisfied with a certain amount of freedom—protected from license on the one hand, and from the burden of responsibility on the other—these perpetual defectives might each by his labor contribute his quota to the good of the whole.

There is yet one other point I would call your attention to—one which you will often be called to combat. People labor under the delusion that asylums and training schools are hospitals of cure; and you will probably finds cranks—both medical and educational—who stand ready to accept large amounts, affirming that they can take even a profound idiot, and after a few years of “treatment” send out such a one ready to prepare for a college examination, or to make his way successfully in the commercial world. Charlatans, each and every one! and I say to you emphatically, believe them not. You may have to repeat more than once what I say again and again to weeping mothers: “There is no cure for that which is not disease, but defect. We cannot replace what has never been placed. Modify and arrest what is evil; encourage and draw out and exercise what is good, yes—but bring to perfection—never; the limit is soon reached.” No, there is no cure. For the imbecile as for the epileptic, that which the cradle rocks the spade will cover, and well it is, if the spade early

do its work cutting short transmission; for of this, as of many another sorrow, "the sooner it is over, the sooner to sleep".

Recapitulating, you will see that I have striven to make clear to you the different classes and grades of mental defect, together with an outline of present methods of dealing with each. The impossibility of carrying out these methods in the home, I trust I have also impressed upon you—the impossibility of cure; the evils of atavism, the certain transmission of inherited taint, being intensified in this class of defectives above all others, and therefore the absolute necessity for permanent sequestration in order to secure the greatest good to the greatest number; good to the individual, to the family, to the community and to the nation.

The
Philadelphia Medical Journal
(Weekly)

JAMES HENDRIE LLOYD, A.M., M.D., Editor.
JULIUS L. SALINGER, M.D., Associate Editor.

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